



# ICONIC

RUNJEET  
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ARMS & ARMOUR FROM THE EAST

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For my mother Hardev, wife Harjinder,  
daughter Elahee and son Basant.





## INTRODUCTION

This catalogue accompanies the third and last exhibition in my ICONIC series. Following 2017's successes in Hong Kong and London, I am excited to be closing the series in Manhattan at the renowned Tambaran Gallery, just east of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This latest group of exceptional items focuses on arms and armour from the 15th–19th centuries—objects that show strong imagery and inscriptions linked to the vibrant religions and cultures of the East.

Some also offer us fascinating connections with the West. Two other strong categories emerge from this group: a set of rare Tibetan leather armour, mostly dated to the 15th–18th centuries and previously hidden away in an English collection for decades; and an assemblage of North Indian objects attributed to the Punjab and the Sikh Empire, mostly from old British and European collections.







I

## KATAR DAGGER

RAJASTHAN, INDIA  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 430 MM

This katar has sacred Hindu verses decorating its hilt, applied generously in gold on a cross-hatched, blackened surface. The calligraphy is neatly arranged: wrapping expertly around the handgrips and rendered in short, regular lines on the side bars. This text is a Sanskrit stotra known as the Rāma- rakṣā-stotra, attributed to Budhakaśika Ṛṣi. It is a hymn of praise, and used as a prayer for protection to Lord Rama. Like many stotra, it has a distinctly tantric character; its recitation often meant to be coupled with breathing practices, visualisations and the wearing of talismans—making it ideal for its application on this dagger, which would have been an important object of devotion.

The short blade is made of Indian crystalline wootz Damascus, with a pronounced central rib and a swollen, armour-piercing tip. The original wooden scabbard still retains its red silk velvet covering, though it is now worn and faded by age. The silver chape is also original.

A similarly decorated hilt is illustrated for us by Hendley<sup>1</sup> and shown as being inscribed with Shakti stotra—or lines in praise of the Devi. Another is in the new publication by Robert Elgood: *Rajput Arms & Armour—the Rathores & their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*, page 662.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Hendley, *Damascening on Steel or Iron, as practiced in India*, 1892, plate 16





2

## ROCK CRYSTAL PESH-KABZ

NORTH INDIA  
18 - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 420 MM

This blade is forged from *jawhar* or *fuladh* steel—what is known in the West as wootz Damascus steel (or watered steel due to the attractive wave-like patterns). The dagger is categorised as a *pesh-kabz* due to the straight blade with reinforced cutting edge and T-section spine. The unusual hilt is fitted with rock crystal grips secured by gem-set metal pins and sandwiching a metal core. Both faces of the tang have miniature paintings on paper depicting the avatars of Vishnu. On one side (from left to right): Narasimha, man-lion, is shown gutting the demon Harnaakash; centrally, Vishnu himself can be seen rescuing an elephant called Gajendra; and thirdly, the boar incarnation Varaha kills a demon to protect the earth which he props up with his tusks.

On the handle's other side there is a rare depiction of the horse-headed Hayagriva, the 18th avatar of Vishnu; in the centre, Matsya the fish avatar

kills a demon; and lastly, we can see the churning of the ocean, with Vishnu depicted as Kurma the giant turtle.

The scenes are painted within gold arches, which are bordered by two panels of golden foliage on a green background. This *pesh-kabz* is coupled with its original leather-covered wooden scabbard, replete with an iron chape decorated with gold *koftgari* and an old paper armoury number.

It is possible that the dagger is actually older than the inserted paintings. The paintings are likely to be from the mid-19th century, while the dagger could date to the late 18th century or early 19th century.

In the 1880 work by Lord Egerton, as part of the catalogue of the arms in the Indian Museum (London), he describes a *pesh-kabz* of the exact type shown here: "hilt covered with

rock crystal beneath which are seen native paintings of mythological subjects; the rivet heads attaching the crystal to the hilt are concealed by rubies. Lahore. (8528.-51)"<sup>2</sup>.

The dagger mentioned by Egerton was transferred to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1879 and is now in the Museum's storerooms with the museum number of 3433(15).

Further, a *pesh-kabz* with rock crystal grips and a painted tang in floral patterns is in the Al-Sabah collection, Kuwait, and published in the new book *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements* by Salam Kaoukji (p.266, no.99).

My thanks to Susan Stronge for pointing out the current location of the dagger described by Egerton.

### References

- <sup>2</sup> Egerton, *Indian and Oriental Armour*, 1968, p.130, no.619







3

## IBRAHIM DAGGER

ALWAR, INDIA  
LATE 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 452 MM

This fine Indian dagger is from Alwar (previously Ulwar), a princely state formed in 1770 AD, and now a city in modern-day Rajasthan. Its highly unusual form speaks of both European and Mughal influences.

The blade is of the highest quality wootz or jahuar steel, of a type sometimes referred to as *kara-taban*, a Persian term meaning *brilliant-black*. There are five slotted fullers just below the spine, each about 35mm (1.4 inches) long, and they terminate at a tip that is intentionally clipped in the style of a European hunting knife (a form echoed by the scabbard's silver chape). Unusually, two further fullers sit opposite each other in the ricasso section near the base of the blade.

The blade is precisely inlaid in gold within a cartouche:

مبهمه الربا دم حم لمع  
ررول اس دم ح ق قات شم

"Work of Muhammad Ibrahim.  
Mushtaq Ahmad, made in Alwar."

The identity of the Mushtaq Ahmad mentioned on the blade is not clear but it is likely that he was the person for whom the dagger was made. We do, however, know that this exquisite piece was crafted by the swordsmith Muhammad Ibrahim, probably one of the famous Alwar artisans mentioned by Powlett in the 1878 work *Ulwur Gazetteer*<sup>3</sup>.

According to Powlett, these artisans were known far and wide and given land in lieu of pay—a testament to the high esteem they were held in by their royal employers.

Indeed, a blade made by Ibrahim resides in the Royal Collection and boasts of similarly high quality watered steel<sup>4</sup> (Royal Collection Trust, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), and illustrated in the recent book by Kajal Meghani *Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India 1875–6*, page 128 (RCIN 11297.a-b).

High quality, dark coloured wootz seems to be a hallmark of Ibrahim and another sword marked to him in a private collection known to the author also supports this theory. The rounded top of the ivory grips and cross guard is reminiscent of the so-called cloven-pommel daggers, which began to appear in Mughal paintings at the start of Jahangir's reign<sup>5</sup>. However, the push-button scabbard-release and the clipped tip are both features found on Anglo-Indian knives, demonstrating the broad-minded approach to this weapon's design and production.

The cross guard and grip straps are all decorated in heavy gold overlay, unusually, employing two colours of gold. The guard's intricate patterns show a traditional deep yellow colour to the gold, highlighted with a lighter shade. The grip, however, differs in design on each side, with one having floral motifs in a traditional gold *koftgari* manner and

the other a repeating cross pattern. This cross pattern is also seen on Lucknow enamel-work and can be viewed in a late 18th century Huqqa base which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (museum number IS.122-1886)<sup>6</sup>.

The original wooden scabbard is covered with green silk velvet, with a silver chape and locket. It has done well to protect the original finish on the blade which remains in high polish and showing a good contrast to the wootz pattern.



## References

- <sup>3</sup> Powlett, *Gazetteer of Ulwur*, 1878, p.118.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/11238/sword>
- <sup>5</sup> Kaoukji, *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements*, 2017, p.127.
- <sup>6</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O16045/huqqa-base-unknown/#>











4

**KARD DAGGER**

PERSIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 394 MM

Grips of walrus ivory form the handle of this Persian kard. Its heavy blade of wootz Damascus steel has a panel of scrolling foliage and arabesques in high-relief at its base and then finishes in an armour-piercing tip. The bolster caps are decorated with a large, pierced panel of complex calligraphy (which is undeciphered) while the backstrap has a delightful, long calligraphic verse from the Qur'an:

يرقى حت فوو ه ل ل ن م رصن  
ن ب ي ن م ؤ م ل ل ا ر ش ب و و ب ي

"Help from Allah and a speedy victory. So give the Glad Tidings to the Believers." (Surah 61 (al-Saff), part of vs. 13.)<sup>7</sup>

This is set within a *jali*: a decorative supporting framework for the Arabic letters. The kard's wooden scabbard survives and is covered with black, tooled leather and completed by a silver chape and locket, chased with floral decorations.

A similarly pierced kard dagger is in the Tanavoli collection<sup>8</sup> and dated 1024 H (1615–1616 AD).

**References**

<sup>7</sup> Qur'anic translation taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation & Commentary* (3rd ed.), Lahore, 1938

<sup>8</sup> Allan, *Persian Steel: The Tanavoli Collection*, 2000, p.39, no.11







5

**PIERCED KARD**

PERSIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 368 MM

This Persian kard dagger comes from the same collection as the previous example and shares many of the former's features. This blade is also of wootz Damascus steel and has an armour-piercing tip. The base of the blade on this example has a panel that is chiselled in high relief and depicts two birds hiding amongst flowers and foliage. The base of the spine also shows a single bird within flowers. The bolster is etched to imitate pierced decorations while the backstrap is deeply pierced with scrolling arabesques in a complex and beautiful arrangement.

The kard is protected by a wooden scabbard that is covered with brown leather and mounted with a silver chape and locket, chased with a decoration in the form of an unidentified military insignia.

A similarly pierced kard dagger is in the Tanavoli collection<sup>9</sup> and dated to 1024 H (1615–1616 AD).

**References**

<sup>9</sup> Allan, *Persian Steel: The Tanavoli Collection*, 2000, p.39, no.11



6

## COORG PINCHANAGATTI

COORG, SOUTH WEST INDIA  
MID 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 300 MM



The pinchanagatti is the national dagger of the Coorg people, coming from a district that is now called Kodagu in the south-western Indian state of Karnataka. They are a proud martial Hindu race (Kshatriya) who traditionally resided in the Western Ghat mountain range as land-owning agriculturists. Coorgi men have a distinctive traditional costume which consists of a kupya (a knee-length, half-sleeved coat) over a full-sleeved white shirt. The pinchanagatti is tucked into a maroon and gold sash known as a chale. As the Coorgs consider the pinchanagatti synonymous with their family honour any examples on the Western market, or in Western collections, are rare indeed and would have been obtained with great difficulty.

This particular pinchanagatti has a broad, single-edged, cleaver-shaped blade that is clipped at the rear near the point and decorated with a row of eyelash marks below the spine. The silver handle is of characteristic form, with a bulbous pommel, gold pommel cap, three ornate rosettes, and three gold studs along the grip.

The original wooden scabbard boasts applied gold bands and a silver locket and chape, the latter sweeping to conclude with a bud-shaped finial highlighted with gold. The scabbard is completed by a heavy-linked chain leading to a cone-shaped terminal with silver chains, tokens and translucent red beads. Two final chains capture a second terminal which this time is semi-circular and holds five small implements meant for personal hygiene (including a knife, a pair of tweezers, and an ear spoon).

A very fine example of a pinchanagatti is in the Royal Collection (Royal Collection Trust, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II) and illustrated in the new book by Kajal Meghani *Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India 1875–6*, page 128 (RCIN 11297.a-b).



7

**PHURBA**TIBET  
19TH CENTURY

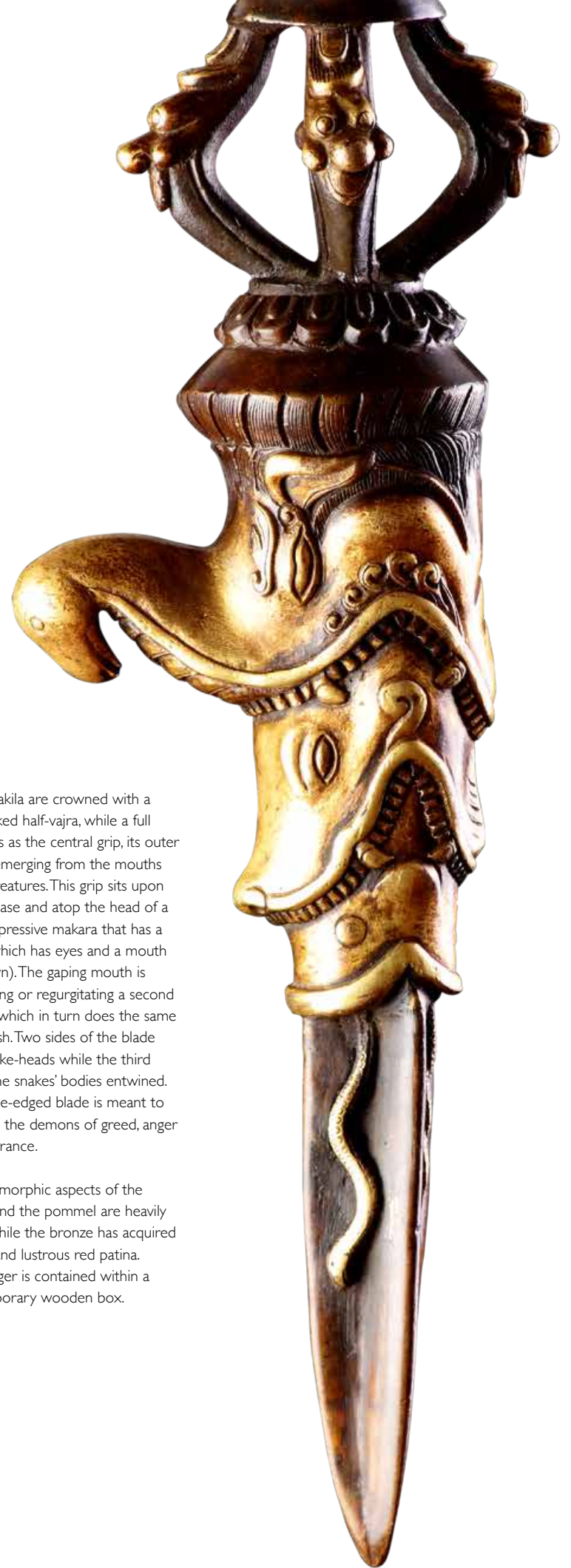
OVERALL 380 MM

The phurba (*kila* in Sanskrit) is an implement of power and magic and its origins can be traced back to the ancient Hindu text the *Rigveda*—believed to be the world's oldest religious writing. Within the text there is an account of the god Indra slaying the serpent Vrita thus allowing the world to emerge into existence. As the earth floated on the primeval waters with the sky lying flat upon it, Indra stabilised it and propped up the heavens with a mythical mountain named *Indrakila* (Indra's Peg). Within Buddhism the phurba is used in rituals, especially in the practice of Dzokchen—the main system of meditation, philosophy, and ritual of the Nyingma lineage of Buddhism in Tibet.

This phurba of bronze shows the triple-faced head of the fierce transcendent deity Vajrakila who vanquishes the demons of the threefold world (the heavens, the earth, and the underworld).

The Vajrakila are crowned with a five-spoked half-vajra, while a full vajra acts as the central grip, its outer spokes emerging from the mouths of sea creatures. This grip sits upon a lotus base and atop the head of a large, impressive makara that has a trunk (which has eyes and a mouth of its own). The gaping mouth is swallowing or regurgitating a second makara, which in turn does the same with a fish. Two sides of the blade have snake-heads while the third shows the snakes' bodies entwined. The triple-edged blade is meant to vanquish the demons of greed, anger and ignorance.

The zoomorphic aspects of the dagger and the pommel are heavily gilded while the bronze has acquired a deep and lustrous red patina. The dagger is contained within a contemporary wooden box.









8

**FRUIT KNIFE**INDIA (MUGHAL)  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 190 MM

This highly unusual folding knife from India has grips made of mother of pearl and a pommel in the shape of a parrot's head. There are three large gold rosettes on each side, each studded with a ruby. The top rosette forms the bird's eye while, below, five smaller rosettes sit along the neckline, and a further two sit equidistant from the central rosette. A small kidney-shaped ruby represents the mouth. A watered steel bolster is inscribed in an oval cartouche with a name:

کچوک اق آآ

"Aqa Kuchak"

The clipped-back blade folds into the grip and is forged from a very high-quality piece of kara taban (brilliant black) jawhar (wootz) steel with a kirk narduban (Mohammed's ladder) pattern, confirming that this must have been made for a person of importance.

A small fruit knife with a parrot pommel, said to have belonged to Empress Noor Jahan, the wife of the fourth Mughal Emperor Jahangir, is in the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, India, and on permanent display in the Jade Room.





9

## WINGED HORSE NUT CUTTER

BALI  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 210 MM

The practice of betel-chewing is an historical cultural phenomenon, endemic throughout South East Asia, India and large parts of the Western Pacific. Paan, in Hindi, is a chew or 'quid' parcel of a betel leaf, areca nut (which is sliced using a betel cutter) and lime paste. It is chewed for its stimulative and psychoactive effects. These cutters are sometimes referred to as *betel nut cutters*—a misnomer as there is no such thing as a *betel nut*.

This 19th century example is in the form of a winged stallion with chiselled and pronounced features, the wings represented by two flame-like projections at the base of the animal's neck.

Of much heavier construction than cutters from other cultures, the russet iron head is a delightful piece of craftsmanship with the handle's silver collars providing a contrast. Brownrigg<sup>10</sup> comments on a very similar cutter in the Samuel Eilenberg Collection, stating that the "restraint serves to highlight the quality of the ironwork".

### References

<sup>10</sup> Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters*, 1991, p.116, no.169









10

**MATCHU**

THANJAVUR, TAMIL NADU  
SOUTH INDIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 650 MM

This large and heavy South Indian chopper was probably used for sacrificing medium-sized animals to please the goddess Kali.

The single-edged curved blade is of russet iron and shows a deep patina. The base of the blade is chiselled with the face of a ferocious *yali* (a South Indian mythological beast). The gaping mouth is full of sharp teeth, a longer curved tooth hanging menacingly over the lower jaw as, above, the nose extends into a curling trunk and the eyes and eyelashes project from the profile of the blade.

The long wooden handle has a rosette-shaped iron pommel cap which secures the tang of the blade within and ensures the strong functionality of this tool.

A turned central bulbous knob aids grip, while a brass or copper bolster cap, a later replacement, provides strength at the point where the blade is connected to the hilt.

This object can be compared to a smaller example in the Metropolitan Museum (acc.no. 36.25.1279)<sup>11</sup> which has similar features—particularly in the face of the beast. These similarities are enough to surmise that this piece came from the same location and perhaps even the same workshop or maker.

**References**

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/31290>



II

**KASTANE**CEYLON (SRI LANKA)  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 650 MM

This is a fine example of the kastane type of sword that is characteristic of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and traditionally would have been worn by the Mudaliyar (a South Indian and Tamil name for 'first' that refers to a person endowed with wealth).

The curved blade is single-edged and fullered along the back on each side. It is marked with VOC—referring to the Dutch East India Company that was instrumental in establishing Dutch Ceylon, which existed from 1640 to 1796. The blade is marked to 1776, 20 years before the end of Dutch control.

The heavy silver hilt is cast and chased with designs of foliate scrollwork set against punched grounds, all sitting below a pommel in the form of a large *simha*, with ruby-set eyes and a gaping mouth. The knuckle-guard terminates with a similar head while a cross-legged, unidentified figure sits on the face of the guard. The quillons take the form of drooping makara heads.

Protecting the sword is the original wood-lined silver scabbard that is richly embossed and chased with repeated designs of scrolling foliage. The four small rings are for suspension from a belt. Unusually, a ring of rubies is set around the body of the scabbard. The throat is marked with the initials: AM—probably those of the European collector who brought the sword back from Sri Lanka.















12

## LEFT-HANDED SHAMSHIR

SINDH (MODERN DAY PAKISTAN)  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 900 MM

Indian curved swords, particularly shamshirs, would have been worn suspended at the left hip from a belt—the sword's tip pointing backwards to facilitate an upwards drawing with the right hand. As such, blade markings would face outwards, allowing them to be seen easily.

This fine shamshir is unusual, though, as the blade is instead marked on the opposite side meaning suspension from the left hip would obscure the marking—we can surmise then that the sword was intended for a left-handed swordsman.

The slender iron hilt is of a type categorised as being from Sindh, and is covered in lustrous sheet gold with imitation rivets that mimic how pulwars from the surrounding region would have had their blade's tangs pinned within their hilts. The top and bottom sections of the grip (which on Sindhi hilts are longer and more slender than on types from other areas) are decorated with imitation wrapped wire. A small upturned pommel disk with a domed pommel finishes the ensemble. The blade, of wootz steel, is inlaid in gold with an undeciphered inscription within a cartouche, and a magic square at the base of a flag.



13

**PISO PODANG**SUMATRA (BATAK)  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 940 MM



The design of this sword's brass hilt, being so redolent of the tulwar type, is widely believed to have been influenced by contact with Indian merchants met via the trade routes. The large bowl-shaped pommel is filled with a natural resin from which sprouts a red-brown tuft of hair—another quite unusual and attractive feature of this rare sword. The trilobed quillons are a locally adopted form, and both faces of the hilt are chased with simple line decorations. The blade appears to be of high quality and was also made locally.

Most swords of this type have utilitarian wooden scabbards but, while this example is also made of wood, it is mounted with several silver fittings—all beautifully chased with floral decorations and augmented with silver beadwork and twisted wire. Two large silver loops provide a means for belt suspension. This silver is believed to have been fabricated by Chinese immigrant silversmiths who, in the 19th century, worked in small towns in Malaya and Singapore and produced silver articles for the Straits Chinese community. The chape is stamped with Chinese assayers' markings implying the fittings are pure silver.











14

**DAO SABRE**

CHINA  
MID 19TH CENTURY  
(QING PERIOD)

OVERALL 900 MM

This handsome Chinese sabre is known as a dao. It is complete, with its matching scabbard, original wrapping for the rectangular-profile grip, and the lanyard cord that was used to secure it to the wielder's wrist. Mounts of chased and pierced brass depict dragons and scrolling motifs on the hilt.

The curved blade is in good condition, well polished and nicely shaped. Its design transitions from a long, flat ricasso near the hilt to a shallow V at the point where the two fullers begin towards the spine.

Interestingly, the sword's high carbon cutting edge can be seen as a grey, cloudy section running along the length of the periphery of the blade.

The emerald green scabbard is still covered in its distinctive dyed shagreen and has metal fittings to match the sword's hilt. Luckily, it also retains the original belt hook and suspension rope.









15

JIAN

CHINA  
CIRCA 1800 (QING DYNASTY)

OVERALL 990 MM

This is an exceptionally long Chinese jian from the turn of the 18th century. This sword type was associated with the Chinese civilian elite and the quality of this example suggests that it was made for minor nobility or a senior government official.

This sword is mounted with the original brass fittings, still with traces of gold on them. The unusual square sabre guard is a highly unusual feature on a jian and this one is deeply chiselled with high relief. It too retains some of the original gilding, decorated identically on both sides and depicting two dragons with sinuous bodies writhing amongst clouds while chasing a flaming pearl. Of important note are the four claws on the rear legs of the dragons, another indication that the sword was made for a man of considerable status.

The wooden grip has been carefully re-wrapped in the proper manner using high-grade silk cord—even the colour has been matched to the original's remnants. The multi-lobed pommel is chased with bats on both sides (a Chinese symbol for good luck) and the scabbard is covered in shagreen dyed in a ruby red colour. The chape and locket have matching bat designs and cut-outs in bat shapes that provide windows through which to view the beautiful grain of the shagreen.

The suspension bar and rings are plain but again show traces of gold. A further mount depicts a mythical dragon crawling up the scabbard—a feature typical on Chinese jians (the most intriguing example I have seen of this feature is on a jade-hilted jian in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum (acc.no.32.75.308a, b)<sup>12</sup>.

The long, straight blade has a pattern-welded steel body with an inserted high-carbon plate which is partially exposed at the edges and tip. The resultant cloudy line along the edges is what is termed a 'horse tooth' pattern and highly sought after by collectors. It is created by precisely polishing the edge at regular intervals, revealing the carbon plate at the desired points. A loose comparison can be made with the 'Prophet's ladder' pattern on Indian and Persian blades: a deliberate trauma to the blade to create 'steps'. Both techniques require a high degree of skill, and ultimately create objects of great beauty.

References

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/27932>



















16

**SOSUN PATAH**NORTH INDIA  
CIRCA 1800

OVERALL 850 MM

This sword is re-published here following exciting new research. It was originally published in the PDF catalogue that accompanied the author's exhibition at Fine Art Asia, 30th September–3rd October 2017. Object number 11.<sup>13</sup>

This rare Indian *sosun patah* sword has a slender iron hilt covered with fine gold koftgari in a highly unusual arrangement of stylised swastikas within two concentric circles. All set against a dotted background.

The elegant downward curved T-section blade is forged from fine wootz (*jawhar*) steel. These highly sought-after and important swords are often forged from the best quality steel and this example shows dark (*kirk*) wootz with contrasting silver and black circles and spirals. The contemporary wooden scabbard is covered with ornately tooled black leather and is fitted with a decorated brass chape.

The design of the hilt perfectly matches an artwork in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston which depicts a sword handle dated to about 1800, possibly from Lahore (accession number 17.2691)<sup>14</sup>.

The artwork, which was purchased by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in India in 1916, not only shows a hilt that matches this example in shape, but also offers identical decoration—even down to the finer details like the differing orientations of the swastikas. It is highly likely that the two objects have a direct relationship with one another.

A recent exhibition held at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum in Coventry, England, entitled *Crafts of the Punjab* (20th October 2017–21st January 2018) displayed a set of armour belonging to the Victoria and Albert Museum which had a similar

swastika pattern to this sword, albeit rendered in a more stylised and symmetrical form. This was also thought to have been made in Lahore in the 19th century<sup>15</sup>.

**References**

<sup>13</sup> [http://runjeetsingh.com/\\_userfiles/pages/files/catalogues/rs\\_ecat\\_autumn\\_248x313mm\\_081017.pdf](http://runjeetsingh.com/_userfiles/pages/files/catalogues/rs_ecat_autumn_248x313mm_081017.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/design-for-a-sword-handle-149101>

<sup>15</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O482046/body-armour-unknown/>

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O455802/pair-of-armguards-unknown/>









17

**CHINESE POLEARM**

CHINA  
19TH CENTURY (QING PERIOD)

OVERALL 1020 MM

This heavy Chinese polearm has an unusual form. The single-edged blade has a slightly cup-shaped, concave tip—a feature found on Indian and Nepalese kora that were used to trap an enemy's striking arm or weapon. The integral, two-stage socket is designed to fit a round shaft. A central knop is faceted with triangles before the upper part transitions into a square section that extends to the blade.

This faceting of the knop and the socket are the most telling clues to the polearm's Chinese attribution, however; similar published examples are not known to the author at this time.

Mounted on a short, red shaft and metal base for display, the original 5-foot-long wooden shaft is also retained.







18

**TIRSOOL (TRIDENT)**

INDIA  
18 - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 680 MM



An impressive example of a *tirsool* (trident) head with attached *bagh-nagh* (leopard claw), this piece is constructed from separate parts screwed to the threaded socket. The socket itself is quite rudimentary, but with an interesting *chakrum*-like disc at the centre. A long central spike screws into the socket, locking into place a W-shaped double-bladed element and the two curling *bagh-nakh* (leopard claws).

The overall design fits with Sikh traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries and it is feasible that this weapon belonged to an order of Nihangs who would not only have used it to great effect, but would also have worshipped it as they do an eight-limbed battle standard named *Ashtbuja* (eight-arms) which is said to have belonged to the 10th Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708).

The *Ashtbuja* is now preserved at the Sikh shrine Huzur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, India, and has obvious connotations to the eight-armed goddess Chandi. Similarities in the design of the two objects can be seen in the *chakrum*-like central disc and the W-shaped spikes.

This *tirsool* is displayed on a short wooden shaft and a steel base for display, but the original foot piece has been retained and the object could be fully mounted on a 6-foot-long pole if required.

19

**SPEAR HEAD**

TANJORE, SOUTH INDIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 440 MM

Originating from South India, probably Tanjore, this leaf-shaped spear head is flamboyantly chiselled in keeping with local tradition. The socket is gently faceted and shows beaded malas (bands) and decorative flaming arches. At the top of the socket is a *kirtimukha* (face of glory) mask with deeply chiselled features. It is shown with bulging eyes and a flared nose, the sharp teeth exposed in the gaping mouth from which the blade extends. Double-edged, the blade has a central, raised spine giving it both strength and aesthetic value.

Kirtimukha was a demon lion created by Lord Shiva to defeat the monster Rahu who had challenged Shiva at the orders of the King Jalandhara. Terrified at the sight of the ravenous Kirtimukha, Rahu sought Shiva's mercy, and Shiva ordered Kirtimukha to feed on the flesh of its own feet and hands to satisfy its own hunger. Kirtimukha willingly ate its body, stopping only when its face remained. Shiva, who was pleased with the result, gave it the name *face of glory* and declared that it should always be at the door of his temples. This is a feature that can be found widely in the south of India, particularly in Tamil Nadu from where this spear head comes.

It is mounted on a short, red shaft and metal base for display.









20

**TWISTED SPEAR HEAD**

INDIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 360 MM

A fine North Indian spear head with beautiful sculptural qualities, each of this piece's four faces has a deeply carved hollow, lessening the weight yet retaining the metal's strength. Where it reaches the tubular socket the blade swells to form a bulbous knop, and this is a feature that can be seen on early Middle Eastern and Persian spear heads of similar form—perhaps these informed the design of this particular Indian spear too. The socket has a large central portion which is beautifully fluted in a barleycorn twist pattern.

The Metropolitan Museum has a matching spear head<sup>16</sup>, shown as part of the 2015 exhibition *The Royal Hunt: Courtly Pursuits in Indian Art*<sup>17</sup>. This exhibition not only reminds us of the beautiful yet lethal nature of

these objects but, through a painting by Payag of Shah Jahan in the Museum's collection<sup>18</sup>, illustrates that such fine spears were also status symbols carried by royalty.

It is mounted on a short, red shaft and metal base for display.

**References**

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/32276>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=880a3c1a-7292-4ba0-b8b8-189cc938cd15#!?perPage=20&offset=0>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451267>





21

### MATCHLOCK MUSKET

LAHORE, INDIA  
EARLY 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1500 MM

This example is of the long and slender Punjabi form, and the stock is elaborately covered in polychromatic decorations with red-petalled flowers and green leaves set on a gold background. The metal side-plates are treated with the same motifs. Some minor flash damage under the pan indicates that the gun has been fired, and illustrates the lack of practicality of such lavish decorations. These items were, however, as much works of art and status symbols as they were weapons.

The butt is straight, thin and five-sided with the end painted in a spray of long, green leaves. The D-shaped trigger is cut and pierced, and decorated with gold koftgari; as is the match-holder (serpentine) which, when the trigger is depressed, would have lowered a lit match towards the pan. The pan cover is retained and shaped as a flower, still working to keep the pan dry when not in use. The octagonal barrel is profusely covered in gold koftgari which is in an impressive state of preservation.

The repeating floral patterns are in keeping with what was produced in Lahore in the late 18th and 19th centuries, and the gun is complete with original ramrod and gilt-copper barrel bands.

There are two matchlock muskets from the Royal Armouries, Leeds, illustrated in the 1999 book edited by Susan Stronge *The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* (pages 140–141). They are believed to have been made in Lahore in the early 19th century, and between them they share many similarities to the gun shown here. A third was displayed as part of the 2015 Metropolitan Museum exhibition *The Royal Hunt: Courtly Pursuits in Indian Art*<sup>19</sup> and this originated from the same smith as the two mentioned above: Haji Sha'ban.

#### References

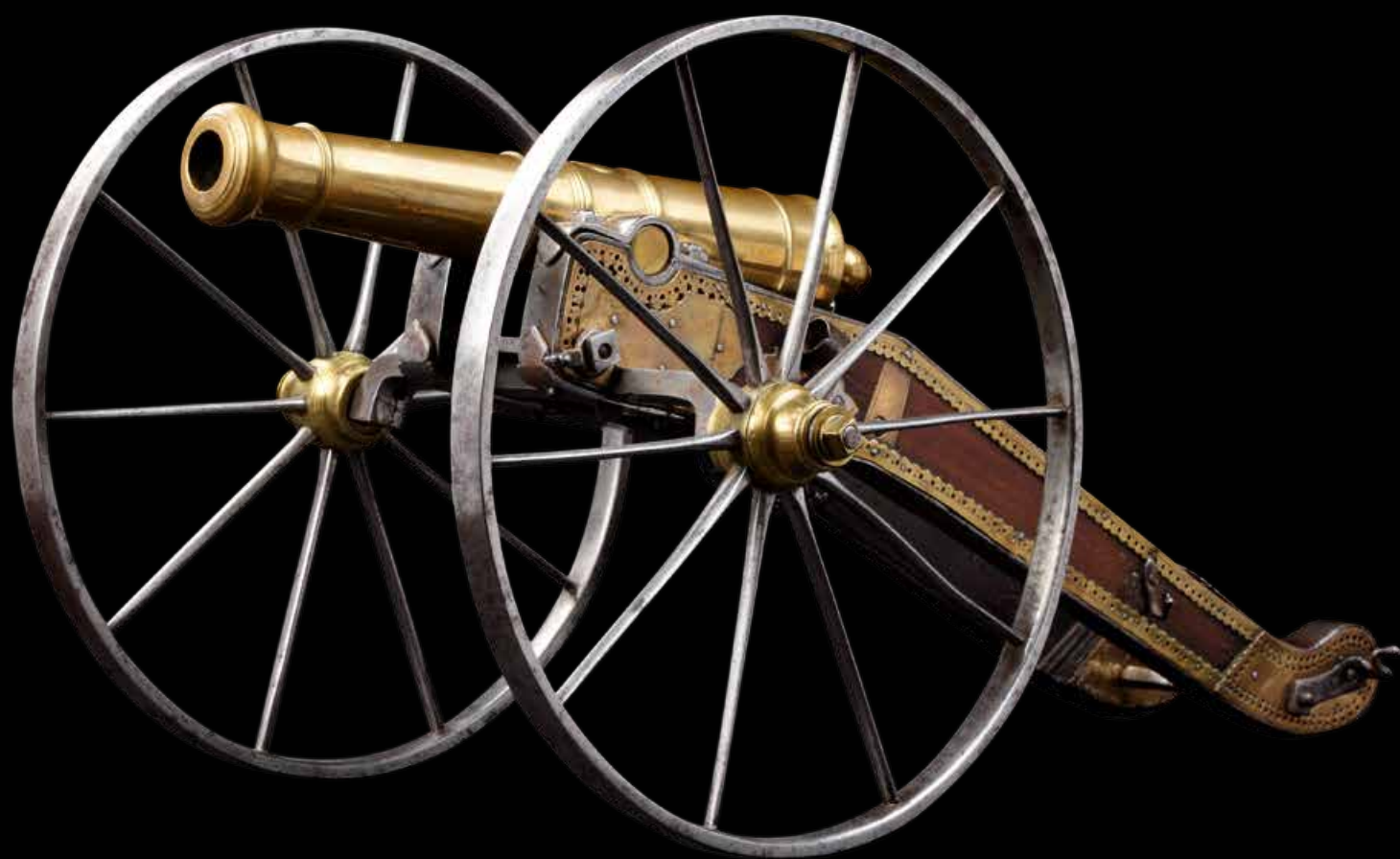
<sup>19</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=880a3c1a-7292-4ba0-b8b8-189cc938cdf5#!?perPage=20&offset=0>













22

## LARGE MODEL CANNON

LAHORE, INDIA  
19TH CENTURY

WHEEL DIAMETER 285 MM  
BARREL LENGTH 310 MM

This large model cannon has a multi-staged brass barrel with a flared muzzle and is stamped with the letter J(?) and the number 481. Fitted to the carriage by means of moulded trunnions, and pinned down with steel straps, the barrel is held at the cascabel by a ring attached to the elevating screw (an important mechanism used to adjust a shot's trajectory). Two large steel wheels with ten spokes each add to the impressive presence of this model.

The wooden carriage is reinforced with steel straps along the edges, and with decorative brass fretting and plates on the faces.

The style used is similar to that shown by the 6-pounder Sutlej Gun which, said to have been captured in the first Anglo-Sikh War (1845–46)<sup>20</sup>, is now in the collection of the Royal Armouries.

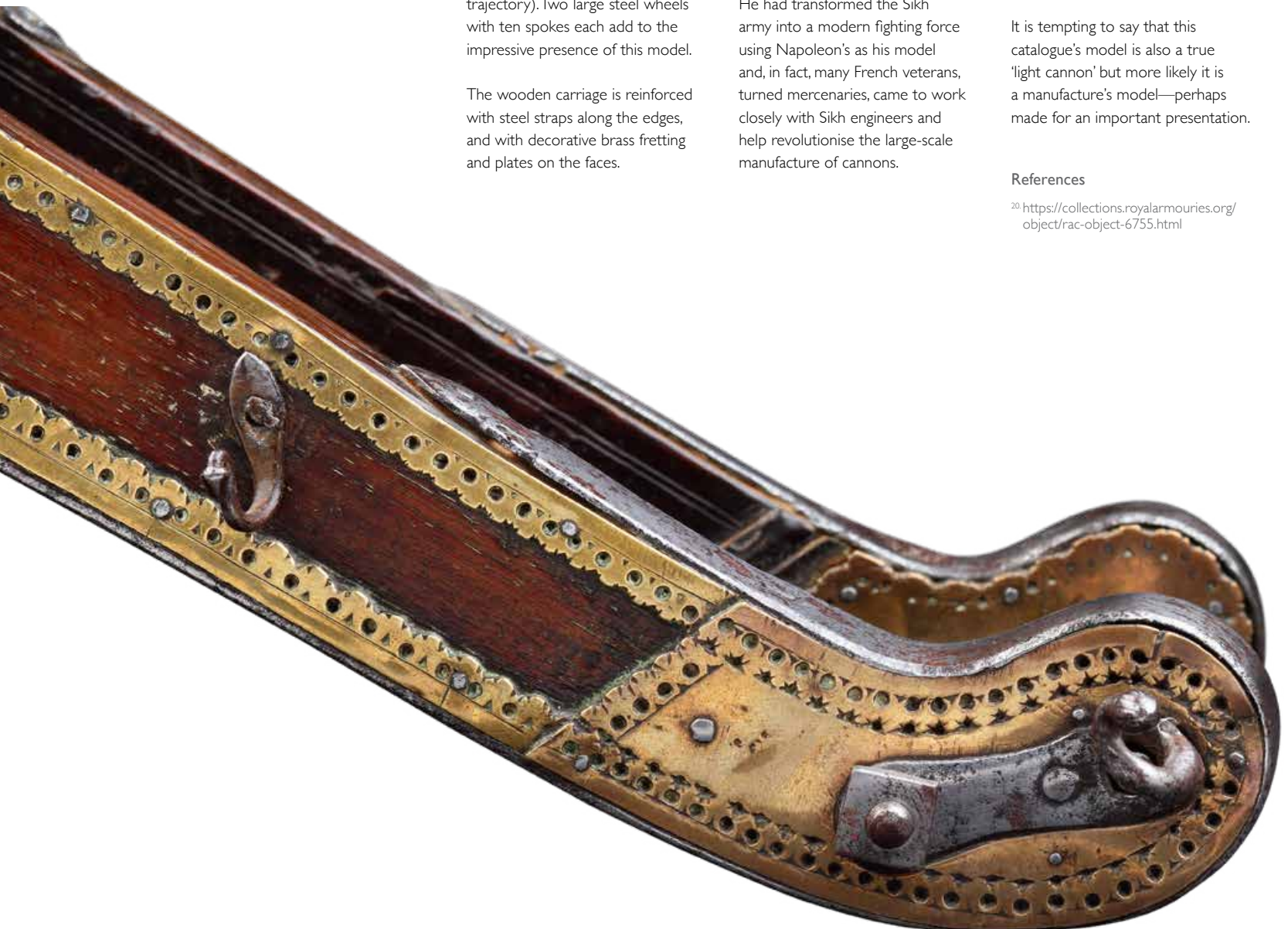
At its peak, Ranjit Singh's artillery forces were on par with those of the British East India Company. He had transformed the Sikh army into a modern fighting force using Napoleon's as his model and, in fact, many French veterans, turned mercenaries, came to work closely with Sikh engineers and help revolutionise the large-scale manufacture of cannons.

Two Sikh light cannons on carriages (which appear to be of a similar size to the one shown here) are photographed in what is believed to be the only serious attempt at studying Indian cannons: *The Saga of Indian Cannons* by R. Balasubramaniam, 2008. The two cannons are said to be at the Qila Mubarak in Patiala.

It is tempting to say that this catalogue's model is also a true 'light cannon' but more likely it is a manufacture's model—perhaps made for an important presentation.

### References

<sup>20</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-6755.html>



23

# **PAIR OF PRESENTATION PISTOLS**

TURKEY  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 265 MM

Made in the French taste, this pair of Ottoman presentation percussion pistols features Damascus steel parts, generous amounts of inlaid gold and silver, and ornate carvings.

The etched twist Damascus barrels are formed in two stages, with gold sunbursts in place of the fore-sights and gold scrollwork over the breeches. More gold elegantly enriches the tangs and the borders of the flush-fitting locks. The half-stocks are carved and inlaid with silver wire and pellets arranged in patterns of scrolling leafy tendrils and minute petals, while the fore-ends depict monstrous heads with woven motifs behind. There are no provisions for ramrods. The sides opposite to the lock-plates are carved with foliage, a theme echoed in the fluted butts that feature more inlaid silver and 'wrigglework'. Trigger guards with foliate terminals lead the eye down to the grips' swivelling butt-caps, also augmented with gold border ornaments.











24

### STEEL HUNTING BOW (KAMAN)

INDIA  
LATE 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1105 MM

On occasion, the field of arms and armour surprises even the most experienced experts, and this has been the case with this possibly unique late 19th century Indian steel bow, or *kaman*. Indian steel bows are not unheard of, most being from the late 18th and 19th centuries, and they are thought to have come about in order to streamline the intensive production process required to create a composite bow—which is one made from several layers of horn and sinew. This example follows the form of the more commonly encountered steel bows but, unlike the usually very late examples, it does not disassemble at the grip (which here is covered in black leather). Another difference, and what really sets this bow apart, is the inclusion of antelope-head tips. Pleasingly modelled from silvered copper, the tips have twisted horns and large ears and a depression just above the nose retains the loop of the original bowstring. The animal subject matter of the bow likely indicates that this weapon was made for the hunt.

The misconception that steel bows are a late invention is addressed by an Iranian bow in the Furusiyya Collection<sup>21</sup> that is said to be from the 15th–16th centuries. It is also thought to be unique.

#### References

<sup>21</sup> Mohamed, *The Arts of the Muslim Knight – The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection*, 2008, p.384, no.359

25

### INDIAN ARROWS (TEER)

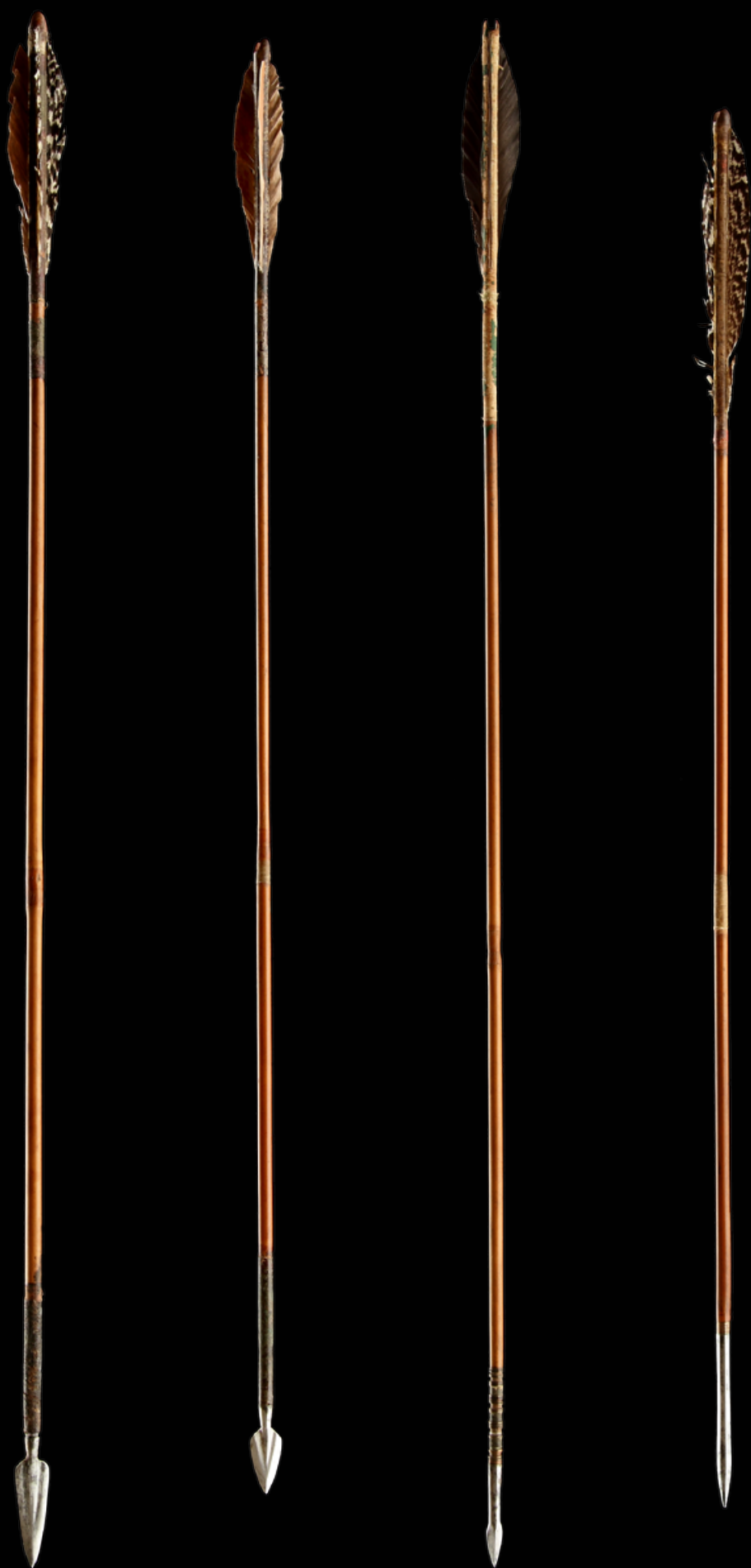
INDIA  
18 - 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

SHORTEST 690 MM  
LONGEST 760 MM

These four Indian arrows are made of cane and have beautiful feather fletching from unidentified birds. They terminate in nocks of wood. The polished steel arrowheads are of high quality: two being of

triangular form, one of diamond section, and the last of bullet form - each tang secured to the shaft with either rattan binding, which is painted, or with small copper and brass bands.









26

## PRESENTATION BOLAS / BOLEADORAS

ARGENTINA  
20TH CENTURY (FIRST HALF)

DIAMETER OF BALLS 650 MM

Here we have a very rare set of presentation boleadoras (or bolas). The term comes from the Spanish word *bola*, meaning *ball*, and is given to a type of throwing weapon made of weights attached to the ends of interconnected cords and used to capture animals by entangling their legs or even wound them if thrown with enough force.

Boleadoras were most famously used by the *gauchos* (cowboys) of South America but they are thought to have more ancient origins. Depending on the individual weapon's design, the thrower grasps the boleadora by one of the weights or by the nexus of the cords. He gives the balls momentum by swinging them and then releases in the direction of his prey.

This set consists of three beautiful lapis lazuli balls of equal diameter, connected through their centres with long lengths of plaited leather cords, and finished with decorative silver caps on both poles that show floral motifs. Lapis lazuli is a hard metamorphic rock, used as a semi-precious stone due to its intense blue colour.

The most famous mines are in Afghanistan, but lapis is also mined in the Andes Mountains in Chile, which is the obvious source for the balls in this set. It is likely to have been made as a presentation piece for a wealthy or important man.

For comparison, a presentation set with elephant ivory balls and silver fittings is in the collection at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Museum in Austin, Texas, and was given to President Johnson by His Excellency Lieutenant General Juan Carlos Onganía, president of Argentina, April 13th 1967 (accession number 1967.19.1).





27

**QUIVER**TIBETAN OR MONGOLIAN  
15 - 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 520 MM

Don LaRocca<sup>22</sup> classifies this type of leather quiver as a *bse dong* (Tibetan): *bse* in reference to the decorated leather; and *dong* meaning a hollow container. The quiver is made entirely from shaped panels of stiff leather; the edges of which are sewn together with thin, flat leather laces in a braided cross-stitch. This has been re-stitched on one side later with a slightly thicker leather lace. The body of the quiver is representative of its type, with a flat back, a boat-shaped bottom, and a rounded front. The cowl or hood to keep the arrows dry is missing on this example, but the top collar remains. A complete example with a hood can be viewed in the Royal Armouries, Leeds (XXVIB.141)<sup>23</sup>.

The quiver's decoration consists of a layer of gold leaf covered with shellac, pigmented in the characteristic red-brown colour; and finished with designs painted in fine black lines. There are four medallions, the top one on the collar containing the auspicious Buddhist symbol of a conch, and the lower three each containing 'wheels of joy', representing Mount Meru—a sacred mountain with five peaks considered to be the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes.

The medallions are linked by two large, lobed cartouches, the contents of which are now eroded (possible designs for what illustrated these areas can be seen in a similar example in the Metropolitan Museum<sup>24</sup> which has a snow lion in one medallion and a peony in the other). The designs are all surrounded by honeycomb or tortoise-shell patterns, stylised clouds and bands of keys and flowers. The rear is undecorated.

**References**

<sup>22</sup> LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas—Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, 2006, p.190, no.93

<sup>23</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-9005.html>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/26595>







28

**LEATHER CRUPPER**

TIBET

15 - 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

OVERALL 590 MM

The importance Tibetans place on equestrian life is demonstrated by the elaborate and well-crafted equipment now preserved in museums and private collections. This rare leather crupper illustrates their focus on aesthetics by providing a decorative cover for the crupper strap which is buckled to the back of a saddle and looped under a horse's tail, preventing the saddle or harness from slipping forward. Made of two pieces, it has a large rectangular section connected to a tri-lobed end-piece by means of three small but well-made brass hinges, also tri-lobed. The end-piece allows for the movements of the horse's tail and rear by means of another hinge. The two pieces of leather are applied with green piping, silver wire stitching and iron studs along the borders. They have been painted with gold leaf and covered with shellac. The two outer sections have dark backgrounds with golden, stylised clouds. The central area has a gold background and large red petals—the detailing done in fine black ink. It is understood that the Royal Armouries, Leeds, also has such a crupper; but the only confirmed reference is a photograph of a fully armoured horse and warrior illustrated on the museum's website<sup>25</sup>.

**References**

<sup>25</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-28006.html>

29

## HORSE NECK DEFENCE (CRINET)

TIBET  
15 - 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

OVERALL 460 MM

For the left side of a horse, this neck defence or *crinet* was intended to be secured to the animal as part of a pair. For comparison, a mounted pair can be seen in the Royal Armouries, Leeds (XXVIH.21 and XXVIH.22)<sup>26</sup>.

This particular crinet is constructed from four overlapping layers of leather held together with leather thongs threaded through small, hollow iron bosses near the edges of each band. The outer layer and the third layer are painted with clouds in gold leaf on a dark ground. The second layer is similarly painted with golden clouds, but this time on a red ground believed to be pigmented shellac. The central panel is covered with small square iron plates, each of which has a shallow, rounded boss in the middle. The points where the four corners of these adjacent square plates meet are each covered by a further, smaller, hollow iron boss.

These bosses have a transverse interior bar, over which leather lacing is threaded to sew them to the leather ground. In this example the 'scales' match closely to those of a shaffron in the Metropolitan Museum (2004.402)<sup>27</sup>, and likely would have completed a set of horse armour that included such a shaffron.

The edges of the leather pieces are protected with green leather piping which is sewn with a fine copper alloy wire in a precise chain stitch. Don LaRocca comments that such a wire stitch is likely to have been reserved for the better pieces of Tibetan horse armour<sup>28</sup>.

The rear is stamped with a wax seal which appears to be a series of numbers. The application of wax seals is a fairly common feature on Tibetan armour, and several

examples can be found in LaRocca's 2006 book *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*. Of note are items 1 and 32 which were collected by FM Bailey (1882–1967), an officer during the Younghusband expedition of 1903–4, LaRocca concluding that the Bailey items were likely collected during his employment as a trade agent in Gyantse, rather than during the expedition.

### References

<sup>26</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-36008.html> and <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-36007.html>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/27673>

<sup>28</sup> LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, 2006, p. 105









30

FLANCHARD

TIBET  
15 - 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 520 MM

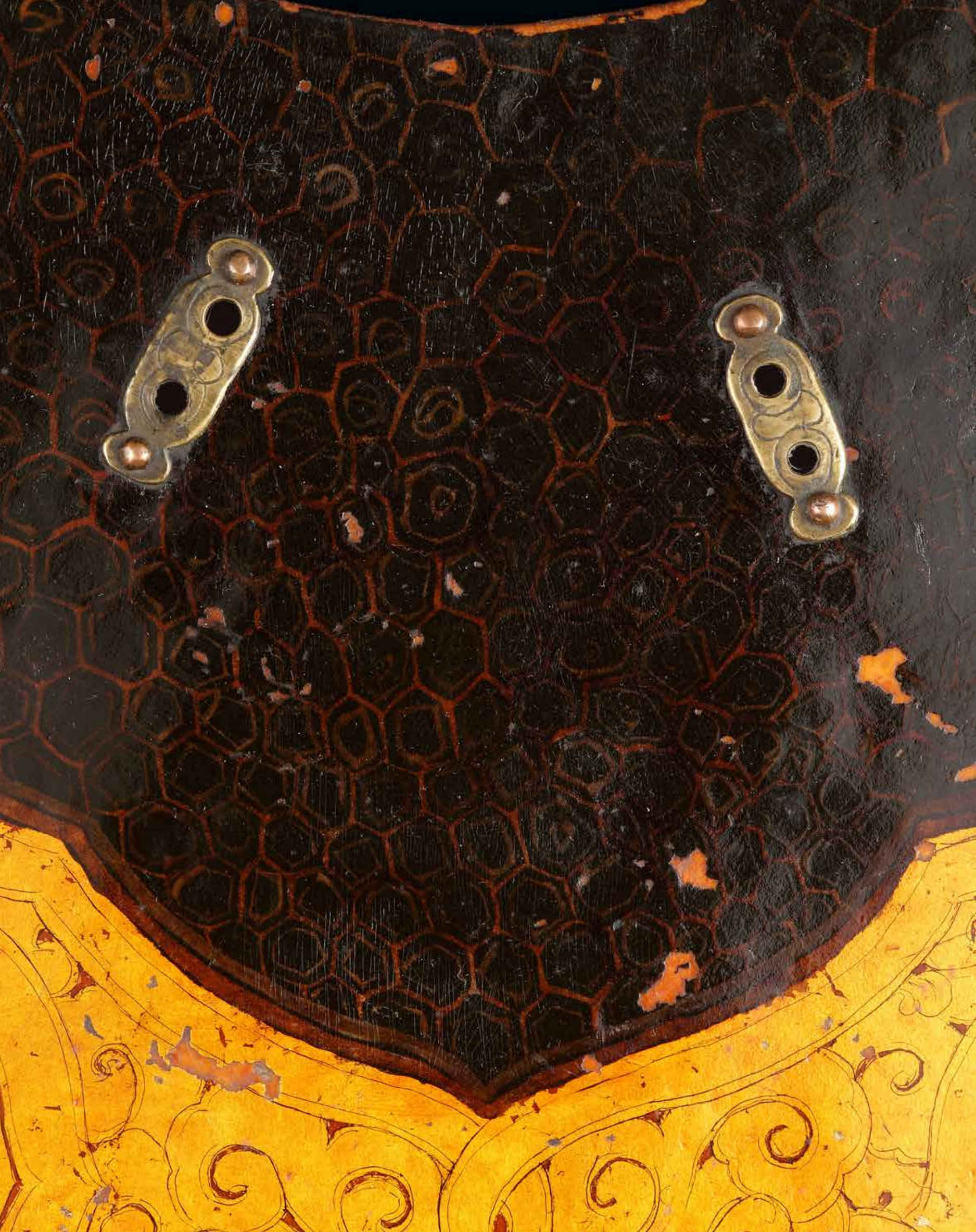
A rare kidney-shaped flanchard, this item is perhaps more elegantly described by the Tibetans who refer to it as *sga'i am*<sup>29</sup> *cog* which, literally, means *ears of the saddle*. Hung at the sides, usually as a pair; they were tucked below the edges of a saddle in order to protect the sides of the horse from the abrasion of the rider's leg or boot.

Formed of a hard piece of leather, it is decorated in two sections. The upper, lobed section is in black, with a red honeycomb or tortoise-shell pattern and has holes for suspension reinforced with brass eyelets. The lower section is a tour de force in Tibetan leather painting. Painted gold against a red background, dense clouds border a middle section of lush sprays of leafy stems within which reside two lobed cartouches, both filled with makara dragons writhing amid large peonies.

References

<sup>29</sup> LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, 2006, p.284











31

**PAINTED DHAL**INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 470 MM

An 18th century Indian shield known as a dhal, this object comes from Rajasthan—probably Ajmer. A similar shield is shown in a brightly coloured lithograph in the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* and labelled: "Shield made by Khuda Bux, of Shahpura, Ajmere". Ajmer was a princely state in India and is now a city in the state of Rajasthan. Interestingly, Ajmer is surrounded by the Aravalli Range of mountains and this could provide the source of the landscapes we see on shields from this group.

This example is convex and probably made of buffalo hide. It has a base-layer of black paint upon which slightly raised floral bouquets and a hilly landscape has been created in gold and red paint, repeating on each quarter of the front's surface.

The flowers are bordered by golden, red and green rocks, shaded by the artist to create a three-dimensional visual effect. Small green leaves add a subtle visual contrast here and there while four star-shaped silver bosses sit near the centre, each decorated with a series of small circles and held in place by a central pin. The rear of the shield is painted with red hills around the edge along with green, shaded rocks. The original green velvet-covered pad and cord handles remain, although one handle is now broken.







32

### MORO SUIT OF ARMOUR WITH HELMET

MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES  
19TH CENTURY

HEIGHT OF SHIRT 720 MM  
HEIGHT OF HELMET 280 MM

Likely made for a man of rank, this Moro armoured shirt and associated copper-alloy helmet is a handsome set.

The shirt is constructed of thick, rectangular buffalo horn panels linked together with rows of heavy brass mail rings. The main frontal plates are mounted with a pair of silver floral bosses, two pairs of stylised sea monsters and two matching latches with protruding studs that help to lock the front together. The two adjacent panels are similarly adorned, as are two small horn pieces that sit either side of the neck opening. The upper back is protected by sixteen overlapping plates assembled in a louvre arrangement. The mid-back and kidneys are covered by a row of long rectangular panels assembled vertically, and connecting to a section of mail and then a skirt of two further rows of horn plates.

The helmet is of burgonet form with a two-piece skull surmounted by a finial. Its embossed decoration imitates that found on the European helmets of the same type. Fluting runs down the bowl to a row of arches that sits against a raised border containing a series of faux lining-rivets which also appears on the flat rim. Fitted at the front peak are three plume holders.

See SINGH, ICONIC, November 2017, London, p.86, no.28 for another Moro armour<sup>30</sup>.

#### References

<sup>30</sup> [http://runjeetsingh.com/\\_userfiles/pages/files/catalogues/rs\\_ecat\\_winter\\_248x313mm\\_291017\\_v3.pdf](http://runjeetsingh.com/_userfiles/pages/files/catalogues/rs_ecat_winter_248x313mm_291017_v3.pdf)









33

**TWO BAZU-BAND**

PERSIA

19TH CENTURY (QAJAR PERIOD)

OVERALL 360 MM

Kept in a private collection as a pair for nearly two decades, these two steel bazu-band appear almost identical in decoration. Despite being slightly different to each other they might have been made as a pair, with the differing patterns meant to help distinguish the left piece from the right. The buckle arrangements confirm the differing orientations.

Shaped to fit the forearm and slightly flaring out over the wrist, the outer surfaces are chased with floral patterns. Gold damascened borders and cartouches are filled with heavily engraved silver floral sprays, setting these two arm-guards apart as exceptional for their type.









34

**ROSEWATER BOTTLE**

PERSIA

CIRCA 1890 - 1900  
(QAJAR PERIOD)

HEIGHT 185MM

This glass rosewater bottle was made by the well-known Persian smith Ja'far and is marked as such on the base:

رفع ج لم ع

"Work of Ja'far:"

The bottle's square-based, rectangular body is covered in pierced and chased silver depicting eight birds perched in dense floral arrangements that emerge from a standing vase on each side. The edges show twisting vines and flowers while the round neck above also has similar floral patterns, this time spiralling towards the lid which is surmounted by a small, bulbous pommel. The bottle still has the dried remains of rosewater within.





35

**TIBETAN CONTAINERS**

TIBET  
18 - 19TH CENTURY

DIAMETERS 75, 90, 75MM

These three iron containers are of cylindrical form, their bodies entirely chiselled and finished with silver and gold embellishments.

The largest (central) of the three is probably from the 19th century and depicts a golden dragon clutching a pearl, entwined in dense scrollwork. The borders of both the base and the lid are overlaid with a silver key pattern, and the lid is chiselled with a geometric design and surmounted with a bulbous knob finial.

The container on the left is probably 18th century in date. It is deeply chiselled with laughing skulls that are emitting gouts of flames from their mouths. The container on the right is also probably from the 18th century and it is illustrated with more laughing skulls, a conch and a flame.

It is suggested that these three objects were used as rice containers for ceremonies.







36

**PAIR OF STIRRUPS**

TIBET

18 - 19TH CENTURY

HEIGHT 165MM

This pair of iron stirrups conforms to the well-known style used by the Mongolians, Chinese and Tibetans.

Two ferocious dragons flank a central slot which would have held the stirrup leather. The dragons, chiselled in high relief, are thoughtfully decorated in silver and gold, with the latter being reserved for the horns and the cheeks. The arms are decorated on the outer surface with an interlocking swastika pattern rendered in silver; while in gold there are the Buddhist symbols of a fish, a wheel and a conch.

The oval foot-plate is recessed, the edge also decorated with the same interlocking patterns as the arms above. On close inspection, the cross-hatched method of silver and gold application on the dragons and side bars can be seen, giving an insight into the painstaking work finishing these sculptural objects must have required.



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I  
KATAR DAGGER